It has truly been my honor to serve as your WSAC President this year. I have to say that the year did not necessarily unfold as I had anticipated last November. That said, it has been a year of firsts. And a year where I was very glad to have the support and engagement of the other three officers.

Commissioner Scott Hutsell graciously shared his experience and imparted a statesmanship and ease that left us all grounded. Commissioner Michael Largent, your 1st VP and incoming President, brought his accounting acumen during budget development and openly shared his sense of humor. Councilmember Jamie Stephens brought his calm demeanor and critical thinking to the conversations.

While the first quarter or so of my term started out “normally,” it quickly became evident that our “usual” was going to be shattered, and we had to learn on the fly. I could not be prouder of the WSAC staff and Eric Johnson’s leadership. When the 2020 legislative session was barely a memory, the staff pivoted, mastered virtual platforms, and helped us navigate the ever shifting sands of what is/was the COVID pandemic and CARES funding. While we gained some rhythm to the communications, our counties were buoyed because of each and every one of YOUR efforts. You, as county leaders, are where we truly touch local citizens and respond to their needs in the moments of crisis. For that, I thank you.

As we move into a virtual County Leader’s Conference and ready ourselves for the year to come, I remain committed to the vital role of local county government and the strength we have together in WSAC and NACo.

Thank you for stepping up, for making a difference for your community, and for joining your voice with the voices of your colleagues around the state. Together we are stronger.

Robert Gelder
WSAC President
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Created in 1906, the Washington State Association of Counties (WSAC) serves the counties of Washington State. Members include elected county commissioners, councilmembers, and executives from all of Washington’s 39 counties. WSAC provides a variety of services to its member counties, including advocacy, professional development, public-private business partnerships, and a forum to network and share best practices.

While voting within the organization is limited to county commissioners, council members, and county executives, the Association also serves as an umbrella organization for affiliate organizations representing:

- County Road Engineers
- Local Public Health Officials
- County Administrators
- Solid Waste Managers
- County Human Service Administrators
- IT Directors
- Planning Directors
- Clerks of County Boards

WSAC also works closely with its sister organization, the Washington Association of County Officials (WACO), which serves independently elected non-judicial county officials, including assessors, auditors, treasurers, prosecutors, coroners, clerks, and sheriffs.
COVID-19 dramatically changed the trajectory of services and the manner in which the Washington State Association of Counties (WSAC) delivered those services in 2020. It has caused us to evaluate if we are simply adapting operations during the pandemic, or if we are making a fundamental shift and change in the way we do business. Since mid-March, our primary focus in our advocacy and communications divisions has revolved around helping counties respond to and recover from the pandemic. While this is a phenomenal opportunity for WSAC to deliver information and communicate with members, it has also created challenges that continuously remind me of what we tell each newly elected official:

What you WANT to work on, accomplish, or focus on is often not what you GET to work on, achieve, or focus on. Case in point: COVID-19.

2020 is an election year. Quite frankly, this is a tremendous distraction to administering a cohesive and harmonized Association. With the results of this election nearly certified, it appears there will be several new county commissioners and councilmembers joining us in 2021. It is incumbent on our current members to lead our efforts and help zero in on the issues important to county government - to focus on the policies, issues, and content essential to counties’ operations and governance. Let’s be good at politics and not get swept into the ugliness of divisive partisanship.

I am committed to serving you and working with you to help members serve with integrity. Remember to stay focused on executing your responsibilities with civility, thoughtfulness, professionalism, and respectful dialogue with peers and the public who has entrusted you to lead county government in Washington.

Eric Johnson
Executive Director, WSAC
The Strategic Litigation, Advocacy, and Communication Program ensures that the use of legal actions is an effective tool to advance the WSAC policy agenda in coordination with legislative advocacy strategies and actions. Our legal actions are used sparingly and as a last resort.
Litigation Activities:

Challenged the constitutionality of Senate House Bill 2887 (2018) requiring Spokane County to elect a five member, by district, Board of County Commissioners.

On August 20, 2020, the Washington Supreme Court ruled that:

“SHB 2887 is constitutional under article XI, sections 4 and 5. Under article XI, section 4, SHB 2887 properly sets forth a “uniform system” such that any noncharter county that exceeds 400,000 people in population will be subjected to SHB 2887’s requirements. Further, under article XI, section 5, the legislature may classify counties by population for any purpose that does not violate other constitutional provisions, and SHB 2887 is a general law that properly implements district-only elections for noncharter counties of a certain size.”

Filed a complaint with the superior court to hold Senate Bill 5472 (Ballot Drop Box Bill) is a violation of RCW 43.135.060, Prohibition of new or extended programs without full reimbursement.

On October 14, 2020 Judge Lee ruled that SB 5472, which mandated County Auditors to significantly increase the number of ballot drop boxes statewide at an estimated capital cost of over one million dollars plus yearly operating and maintenance costs, “is an unfunded mandate pursuant to RCW 43.135.060.”

Reviewed and participated in legal action regarding the State’s constitutional duty of the state of Washington regarding trial court indigent defense.

Filed an amicus brief in Davison v. State of Washington and Washington State Office of Public Defense Supreme Court, where the court confirmed that ultimately the State bears the duty to provide indigent defense services as required under the U.S. and Washington Constitutions. While the State has discretion to delegate to local governments responsibility for providing these services, in so doing the State must provide local governments with the authority and means necessary to furnish constitutionally adequate indigent defense.

The Court remanded for consideration of whether the systemic and structural deficiencies in the current state system, as alleged by the plaintiffs and described in WSAC’s amicus brief, violate the State’s constitutional duties

Initiated research and analysis regarding potential and likely claims of the State of Washington’s statutory and constitutional duty to fund trial court indigent defense.
Worked with counsel and county prosecuting attorneys on amicus briefs about issues that include:

- Personnel and Labor
- Public Works Liability
- Labor and Personnel
- Law Enforcement and Public Safety
- Public Health
- Corrections, Jails and Medical Costs
- Land Use and Zoning
- Taxation, Fees and Charges
- Public Records
- Constitutional and Administrative Authorities for County Elected Officials
- Franchise Agreements
- Juror Pay
- Public Health Responsibilities
- Trial Court Indigent Defense
- County Charter
Member Engagement

100% of counties are members of WSAC

100% of counties were represented at the 2019 County Leaders Conference

27 presidential leadership appointments to NACo committees, caucuses, and task forces

29 WSAC Member Meetings
  - 4 Board Meetings
  - 16 Legislative Steering Committee Meetings
  - 4 Federal Priorities Committee Meetings
  - 3 Policy Review Committee Meetings
  - 2 Audit Committee Meetings
Communications & Member Services

The Communications and Member Services division is responsible for strategic communications, education, networking, member services, and events.

Twitter
1,888 followers
A 15% increase from 2019

Facebook
2,595 page likes
A 73% increase from 2019

Website
22,000 website visitors

Email
100+ COVID-19 News Emails

240,000 User Impressions
Facebook post reach

Key Accomplishments

1. Partnered with the Washington Counties Risk Pool to overhaul the Certified Public Official program which included the new curriculum development, re-branding, and investments in new technology.

2. Produced five virtual conferences and processed over 700 registrations.

3. Re-launched our monthly member e-newsletter The Insider

4. Launched new COVID-19 resources to increase communication and provide vital resources to members and stakeholders.

5. Increased social media engagement and followers.
In April and May 2020, WSAC hosted 8 regional meetings where each of WSAC’s 39 member counties met remotely with public health representatives and legislators from across the state to discuss county efforts and needs in addressing the novel coronavirus.

The regions were

Region 1 – Island, San Juan, Skagit, Snohomish, Whatcom
Region 2 – Clallam, Grays Harbor, Jefferson, Kitsap, Mason
Region 3 – Clark, Cowlitz, Lewis, Pacific, Wahkiakum
Region 4 – King, Kittitas, Pierce, Thurston
Region 5 – Benton, Franklin, Klickitat, Skamania, Yakima
Region 6 – Adams, Chelan, Douglas, Grant, Okanogan
Region 7 – Asotin, Columbia, Garfield, Walla Walla, Whitman
Region 8 – Ferry, Lincoln, Spokane, Stevens, Pend Oreille

The regions covered COVID-19 related topics like

Impact on County Functions | Essential Needs | Public Safety | Budget and Staff Reductions
Reopening Considerations | County Public Health Response to the Pandemic
Advocacy

LSC members met in Olympia five times

They met with:

- Governor Jay Inslee
- Speaker of the House Laurie Jinkins
- Chair of House Local Government Committee Representative Gerry Pollet
- Chair of Senate Local Government Committee Dean Takko
- House Transportation Committee Chair Representative Jake Fey
- Senate Transportation Committee Chair Senator Steve Hobbs
- Washington State Department of Ecology Director Laura Watson
- Tom Bugert and Joanna Eide from Washington State Department of Natural Resources (Wildfire)
- Keri Waterland of Health Care Authority
- Thomas Kinlan of Department of Social and Health Services (Trueblood)
- Dr Kathy Lofy of Department of Health (Coronavirus)

During the 2019-2020 biennium, 4,640 bills were introduced;

- 868 passed the legislature
- 59 were vetoed in whole (26) or in part (33) by the governor

60 Day legislative session
This session brought more than its share of unique challenges, beginning with a new speaker of the house for the first time in twenty years and ending with the arrival of the novel coronavirus and necessary responses.

For the counties, there were some bright spots this session. However, in the last days allowed for bill action, Governor Inslee vetoed a number of bills and budget items in an effort to reduce overall spending in light of the impact the COVID-19 pandemic. Unfortunately, not all of the gains WSAC made this session made it past the chopping block.
GOAL
State funding for their fair share of election costs

OUTCOME: ESHB 2421 is a commitment from the State to pay its pro rata share of all elections starting in 2021.

GOAL
Increased funding for Foundational Public Health Services

OUTCOME: The Legislature backfilled a funding promise in the 2019 budget that had not been fully realized and added $3 million in additional funding for public health infrastructure and capacity.

GOAL
Restoring funding for county solid waste programs.

OUTCOME: While ultimately vetoed by the governor due to the pandemic, WSAC secured a $7 million increase in funding for the Local Solid Waste Financial Assistance program (LSWFA) - a grant program managed by Ecology that provides revenues to county programs for implementation of local comprehensive solid waste management plans. This amount represents a 70% increase over previous funding.

GOAL
Additional investments in affordable housing and homelessness

OUTCOME: The State is providing a total of $160 million in the operating budget for housing and homelessness related programs. In the capital budget, the State provides $7.8 million for projects that enhance shelter capacity around the state and $5 million for a new competitive grant program for the development of community housing and cottage communities to shelter individuals or households experiencing homelessness.

GOAL
Secure a coordinated watershed approach to fish barrier removal.

OUTCOME: The final capital budget includes a proviso directing the Brian Abbott Fish Barrier Removal Board to develop a comprehensive statewide culvert remediation plan that works in conjunction with the state approach to fully satisfy the fish barrier removal injunction mandate. The comprehensive plan must be consistent with the principles and requirements of the injunction and must achieve coordinated investment strategy goals of permanent injunction compliance. The Fish Barrier Removal board shall work and consult with tribes to develop this watershed approach.

GOAL
Securing funding and assistance for local public health to respond to COVID-19.

OUTCOME: EHB 2965 provided a total of $175 million to be directed from the budget stabilization account for public health response and healthcare surge with the remaining $25 million will be transferred into the newly created COVID-19 unemployment account to help businesses and workers disrupted by the pandemic.
The Washington State Association of Counties participates in federal issue policy development and advocacy while striving to build positive working relationships with federal elected and appointed officials.
Federal Advocacy Activities

WSAC members collaborated on three coordinated advocacy efforts to meet with members of the Washington State Congressional Delegation:

1. **January 2020**
   - President Gelder and Director Johnson, Washington D.C.

2. **March 2020**
   - NACo Legislative Conference, WSAC Leadership/Member, Washington D.C.

3. **September 2020**
   - Virtual NACo PILT/SRS Advocacy, Timber Counties Committee Members
The Washington State Association of Counties created the Coastal Counties Caucus, comprised of 14 counties bordering Puget Sound, Strait of Juan de Fuca, and the Pacific Ocean shortly before the creation of the Puget Sound Partnership (PSP) in 2007. The Caucus creates a forum for counties to interact, engage, and recommend WSAC positions on issues relating to the waters of Puget Sound, Hood Canal, and the Pacific Ocean. The program also supports members of the Puget Sound Partnership’s Ecosystem Coordination Board and Salmon Recovery Council, both of which have county elected official representation. The Caucus works to ensure coastal county interests and priorities are brought forward to the Legislative Steering Committee, state and federal agencies, tribal nations, and other key stakeholders.

Key Accomplishments

1. Monitored and reported on Puget Sound Partnership efforts that involved county policy interests to WSAC policy staff and the Counties Coastal Caucus including the 2022-2026 Action Agenda Update, the Toxics in Fish Implementation Strategy, and continuation of the Southern Resident Killer Whale Task Force recommendations (“net ecological gain”).

2. Planned and coordinated the annual meeting at the WSAC Leaders Conference to include peer to peer information sharing and engage with state legislators.

3. Updated the WSAC policy statement for the Puget Sound Partnership to incorporate updated information, objectives, and goals in the state’s salmon recovery efforts.
Columbia River Caucus

The Columbia River Basin Water Supply Development Program was initiated by the Legislature in 2006. The purpose of the program is to seek out and develop new water supply in eastern Washington. New water supplies are intended for both in-stream and out-of-stream use; water from projects funded by the program are allocated 1/3 for in-stream use and 2/3 for out-of-stream use.

WSAC receives funding from the Department of Ecology to provide staff support to eastern Washington county commissioners. This allows commissioners to participate as full partners in the program. The commissioners meet quarterly as the Columbia River Caucus.

Facts about the program:

1. The program was authorized for a ten-year life, beginning in 2006 and is continuing past that limit.
2. $200 million in state bonding capacity was authorized – this has been spent and funding for new projects is allocated each biennium.
3. The Program has broad support from most stakeholders.
4. As of December 2019, 413,845 acre-feet of new water supply had been made available through the program.
Key Accomplishments

1. The Caucus has monitored negotiations between the U.S. and Canada (the Columbia River Treaty), which may affect the provision of additional water supply. We have participated since the start of work on the U.S. side of the border in 2011 by making presentations to the state caucus, testifying during proceedings, and connecting with British Columbia local governments in working on common interests.

2. We continue our long-term work to ensure that counties have a voice in Ecology’s management of the CR Program. This is accomplished by continuing having four members of the Columbia River Policy Advisory Group, which advised Ecology’s Office of Columbia River on administering the Columbia River Program. Counties have been part of the CR-PAG since its creation in 2006.

3. We are continuing to monitor the Environmental Impact Statement process for the Columbia River System Operations Review, a process that started up in late 2016 with a scoping process announcement. During February to June of 2020, draft and final Environmental Impact Statements were issued. During the same time period there were section 7 consultations with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to ensure compliance with the Endangered Species Act. A Record of Decision was issued on September 30, 2020.

4. Quarterly meetings of the Commissioners’ PAG continue to be held and are key to ensuring a flow of information both to county commissioners and from them to the CR-PAG and the Department of Ecology. We also have regular discussions and meetings with the Director of the Office of Columbia River occur several times a year.
Timber

The timber counties program works diligently to support, advocate for, and represent our member counties with interests in timberland management issues. This includes counties that are beneficiaries of state forestlands and counties with other private, state, and federal forestlands utilized for commercial timber harvest, conservation, recreation, and other purposes.

Key Accomplishments

1. Successfully recruited and retained a new, highly qualified representative for WSAC members on the Timber, Fish & Wildlife Policy Committee and to assist with statewide timber issues.

2. We developed a partnership with the Washington Family Forestry Association to improve WSAC members’ representation and engagement with DNR’s Cooperative Monitoring, Evaluation, and Research Committee (CMER).

3. Retained contractor Mason Bruce & Girard, and formed a steering committee to conduct an economic impact study on the Marbled Murrelet Long-Term Conservation Strategy.

4. WSAC secured a meeting for members with USFS Chief Vicki Christiansen.

5. Successfully updated WSAC’s policy statement on forest resources with the Timber Counties Caucus.

6. Supported legislation creating the community forest grant program.

7. Retained Mason Bruce & Girard to represent WSAC member on DNR’s sustainable harvest technical advisory committee.
Financial Health

Accomplishments

3. Created a new, interactive budget development tool
4. Updated Financial Statement formats and created Financial Summary Dashboard
5. Revised and improved financial processes for efficiency and time savings
Financial Dashboard

Total Assets: $1,348,825
Cash: $651,808
A/R & Prepaids: $485,474
Fixed & Long-Term Assets: $211,544

Liabilities: $359,796
Payables: $287,796
Deferred Rev: $72,000

Net Assets: $989,029
Change from 2018: ($150,422)
Staff

Administration & Finance

Eric Johnson
Executive Director

Lynn Fiorillo-Lowe
Operations and Support Assistant

Bridget Lockling
Director, Finance and Administration

Communications & Member Services

Derek Anderson
Director, Communications & Member Services

Melissa Archuleta
Senior Conference Planner

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Program Consultant  
Timber Program Heartwood Consulting LLC
Executive Committee

2019-2020

President
Robert Gelder
Kitsap County

First Vice President
Michael Largent
Whitman County

Second Vice President
Jamie Stephens
San Juan County

Immediate Past President
Scott Hutsell
Lincoln County

Board Members

James Beaver, Benton County
Jerome Delvin, Benton County
Doug England, Chelan County
Mark Ozias, Clallam County
John Blom, Clark County
Eileen Quiring O’Brien, Clark County
Dennis Weber, Cowlitz County
Brad Peck, Franklin County
Helen Price Johnson, Island County
Janet St. Clair, Island County
Dow Constantine, King County
Reagan Dunn, King County
Kathy Lambert, King County
Joe McDermott, King County
Charlotte Garrido, Kitsap County
Ed Wolfe, Kitsap County
Cory Wright, Kittitas County
Dave Sauter, Klickitat County
Edna Fund, Lewis County
Chris Branch, Okanogan County
Karen Skoog, Pend Oreille County
Doug Richardson, Pierce County
Jim McCune, Pierce County
Kenneth Dahlstedt, Skagit County
Nate Nehring, Snohomish County
Stephanie Wright, Snohomish County
Al French, Spokane County
Mary Kuney, Spokane County
Gary Edwards, Thurston County
John Hutchings, Thurston County
Rud Browne, Whatcom County
Satpal Sidhu, Whatcom County
Ron Anderson, Yakima County
Vicki Baker, Yakima County